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MIDNIGHT NATION

midnight nation
created by j. michael straczynski

"THE DEVIL YOU KNOW."

cover
gary frank
jason gorder
dan kemp

Last Issue:
Police Officer David Grey is on a trek cross country to get his soul back before he becomes a Walker, a man-like monster that preys on the living. Laurel is his guide on this journey that they must take in a reality between the cracks of our existence. A place of the lost and forgotten.

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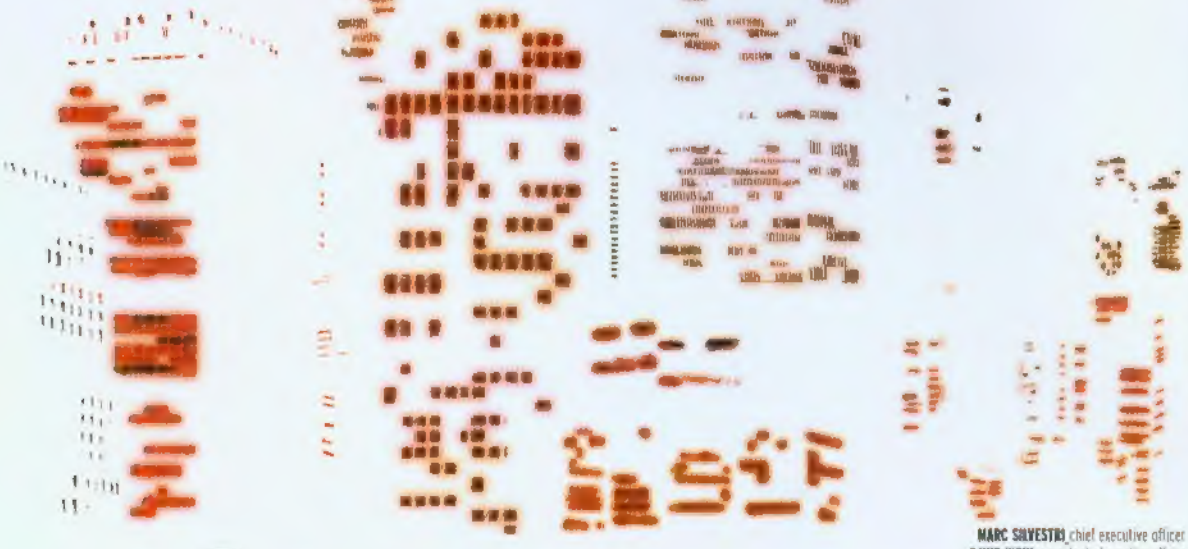

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JOE'S COMICS

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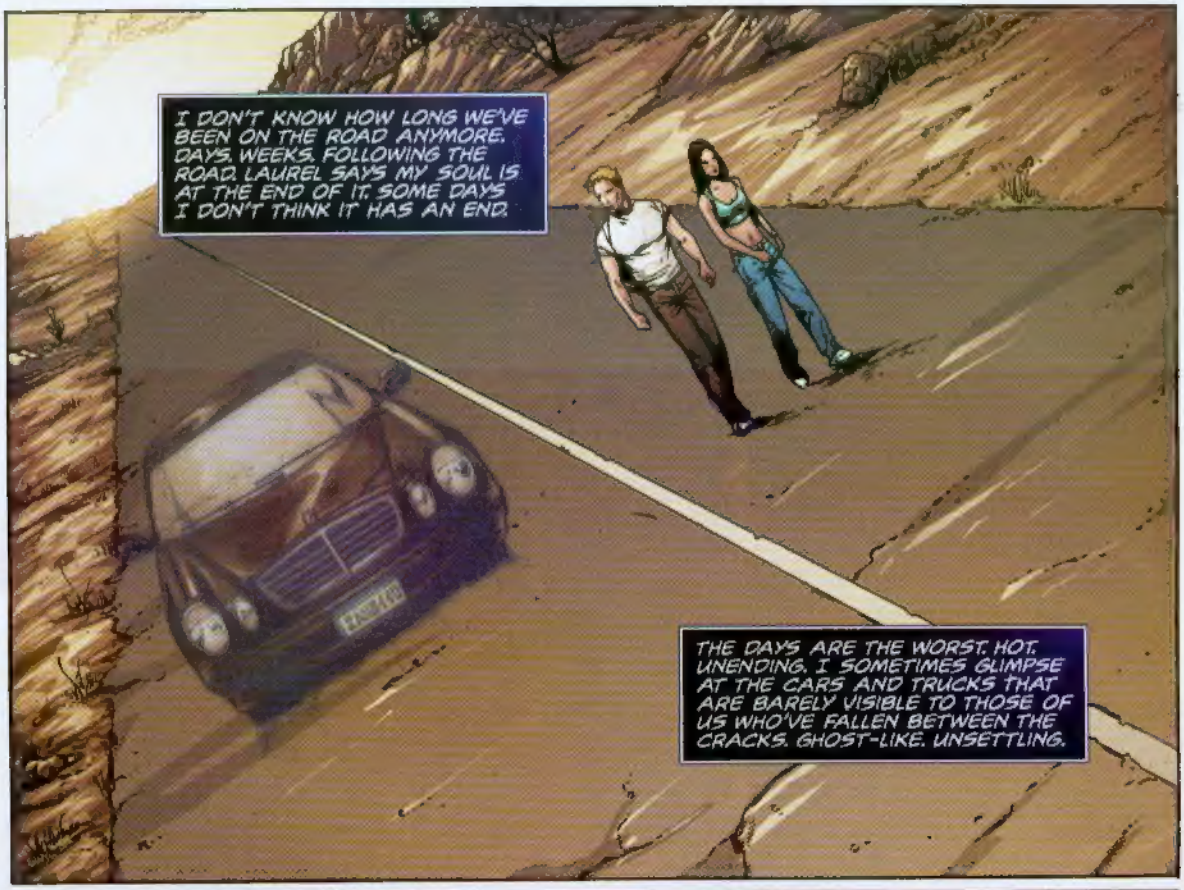
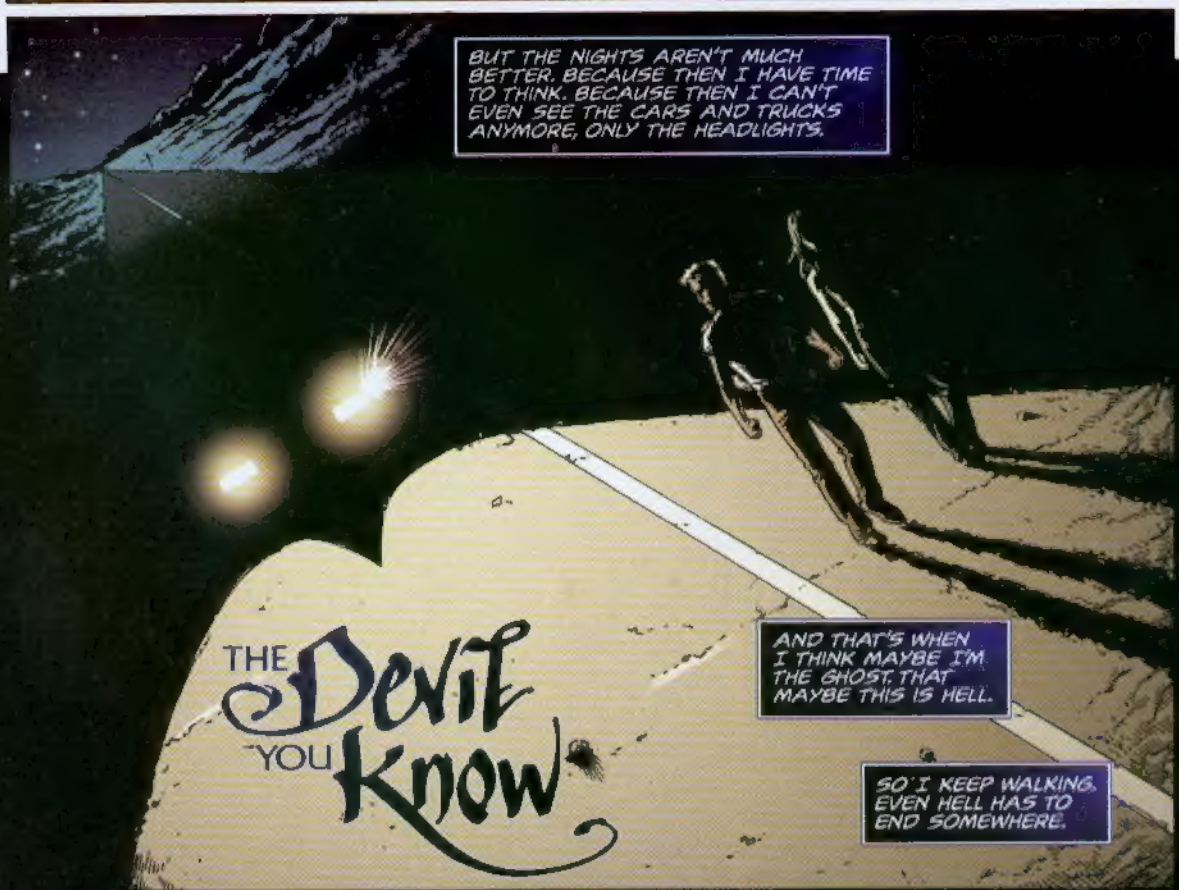

I DON'T KNOW HOW LONG WE'VE BEEN ON THE ROAD ANYMORE. DAYS. WEEKS. FOLLOWING THE ROAD. LAUREL SAYS MY SOUL IS AT THE END OF IT. SOME DAYS I DON'T THINK IT HAS AN END.
THE DAYS ARE THE WORST. HOT. UNENDING. I SOMETIMES GLIMPSE AT THE CARS AND TRUCKS THAT ARE BARELY VISIBLE TO THOSE OF US WHO'VE FALLEN BETWEEN THE CRACKS. GHOST-LIKE. UNSETTLING.


BUT THE NIGHTS AREN'T MUCH BETTER. BECAUSE THEN I HAVE TIME TO THINK. BECAUSE THEN I CAN'T EVEN SEE THE CARS AND TRUCKS ANYMORE, ONLY THE HEADLIGHTS.
THE Devil YOU Know
AND THAT'S WHEN I THINK MAYBE I'M THE GHOST. THAT MAYBE THIS IS HELL.
SO I KEEP WALKING. EVEN HELL HAS TO END SOMEWHERE.

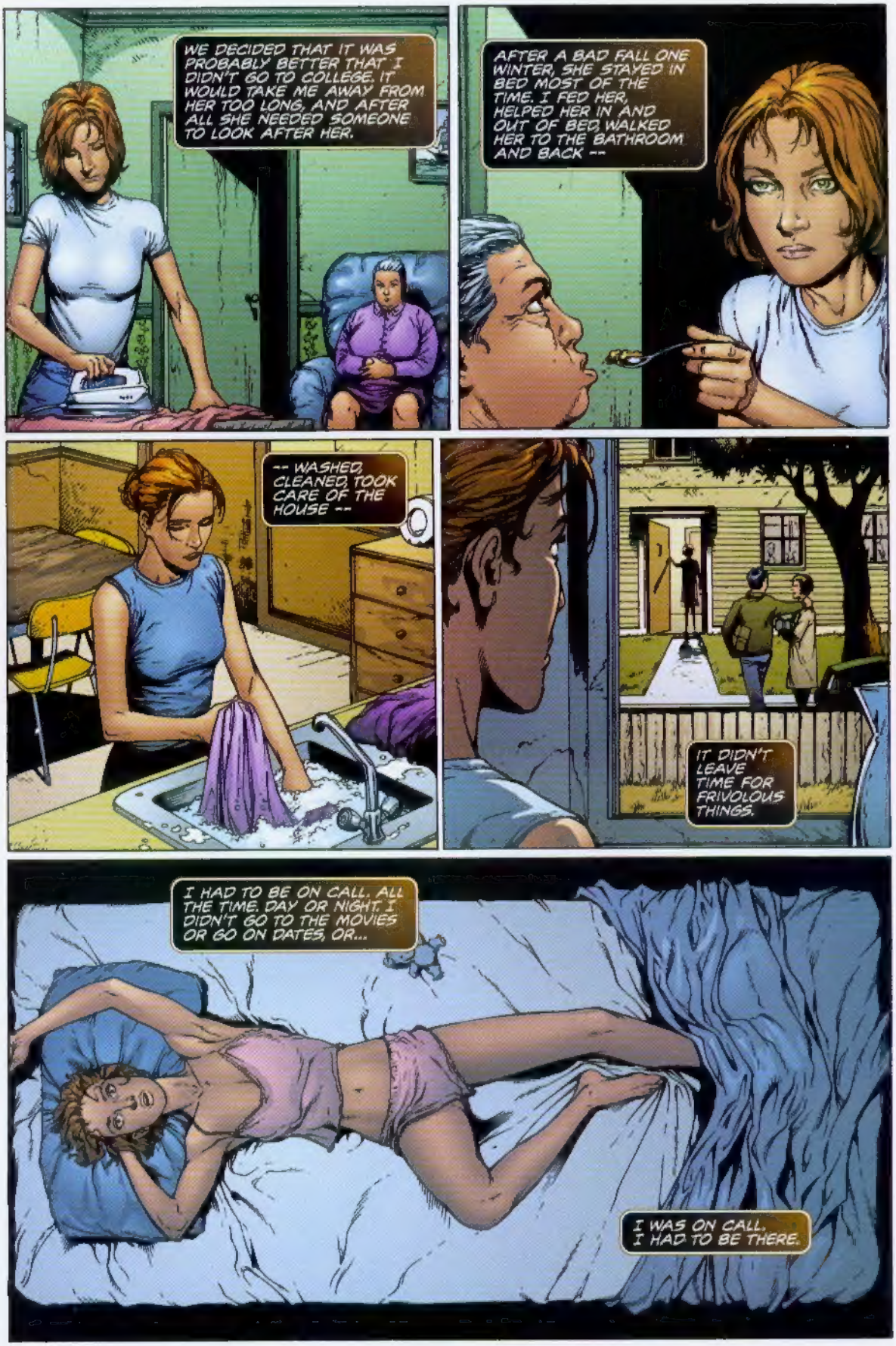
IT'S GETTING LATE. WE SHOULD REST. GET SOMETHING TO EAT.
"GET SOMETHING TO EAT?"
WHERE?
THIS WAY.

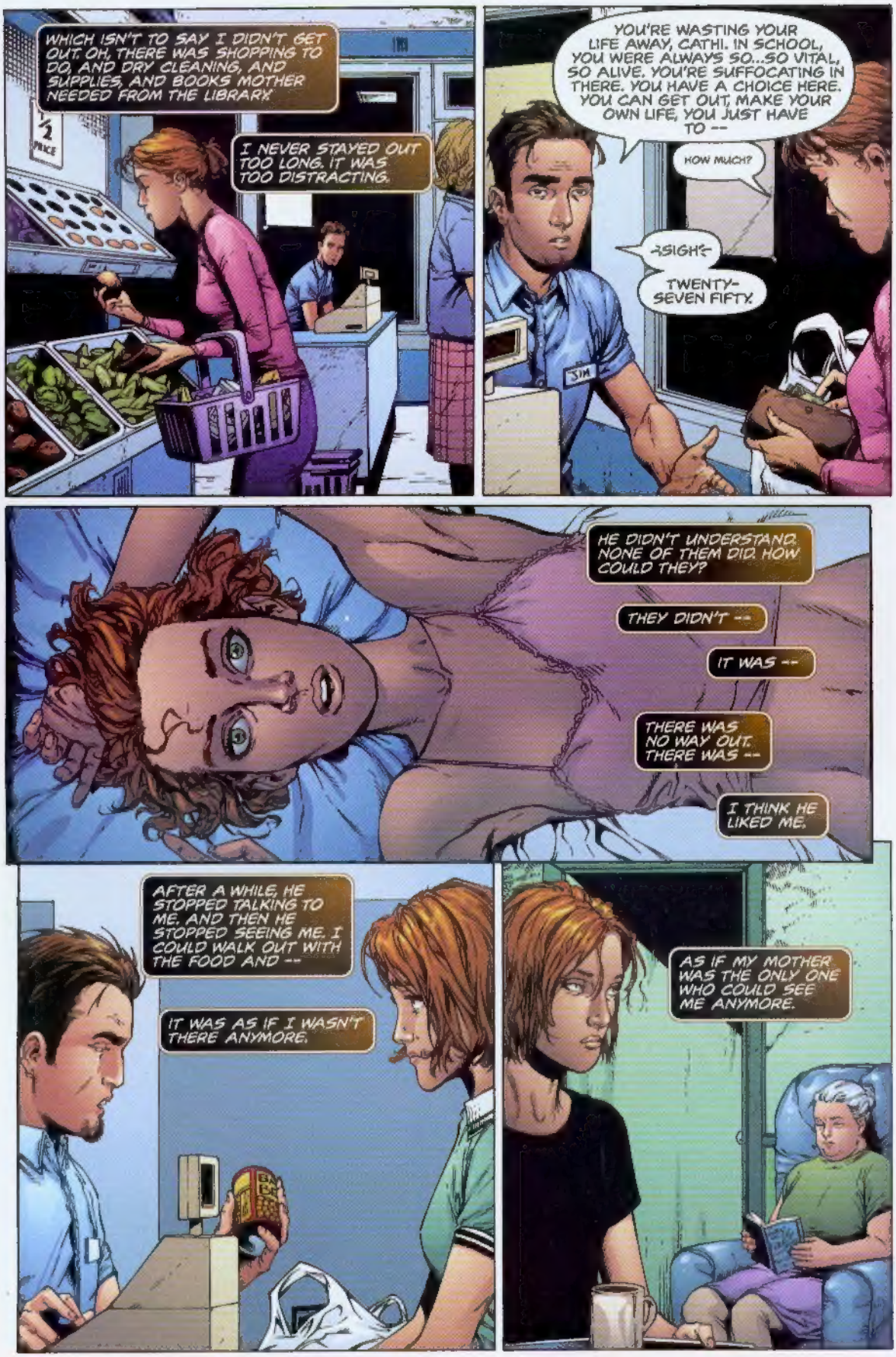
THIS WAY? WHY THIS WAY? WHY NOT THAT WAY? YOU'VE GOT 359 OTHER DEGREES ON THE COMPASS, WHY --
THIS...
...WAY...
NOBODY LIKES A SMARTASS.
REALLY.
YES.
THEN YOU MUST LIVE A TERRIBLY LONELY LIFE.
WHO ASKED YOU?
EVERY PARTY NEEDS A POOPER THAT'S WHY WE INVITED YOU --
YEAH, YEAH...LET ME HANDLE THIS.
PARTY POOPER... PARTY POOPER...

HI...WE WERE UM, JUST WALKING DOWN THE ROAD THERE, HEADING EAST TOWARD NEW YORK, AND WE SAW YOUR FIRE, SO ---
JOIN YOU?
SURE.
THANKS.
I WAS JUST GETTING TO THAT PART.
WHO HAS THAT KIND OF TIME?
SO WHAT'VE WE GOT TONIGHT?
JUST WHATEVER WE CAN CATCH IN THE AREA. WE DON'T GO TOO FAR PAST THE FIRE.
NO SIR, NO WE DON'T.
IT'S DANGEROUS PAST THE FIRELIGHT. ALL KINDS OF CRITTERS OUT THERE.
ALL KINDS. BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW THAN THE DEVIL YOU DON'T, I ALWAYS SAY.
I AGREE.
I'M BOB, BY THE WAY, I'M KIND OF THE SPOKESMAN FOR THE GROUP. THIS HERE'S JEFFERSON, THAT'S SANDY, LEE, MIGUEL, GEORGE, CATHY, ED, ALEXANDER, JEOFF AND CALVERT.
HEY.
WHAT'S YOUR NAMES? JUST FIRST NAMES, THAT'S ALL WE HAVE AROUND HERE. NEVER GIVE ANYBODY YOUR LAST NAME. GIVES 'EM POWER OVER YOU.
I THINK THIS NEEDS ANOTHER TEN MINUTES IN THE FIRE. PARTS OF IT ARE STILL MOVING.
LAUREL.
DAVID.
HI LAUREL AND DAVID.

SO, YOU SAID YOU'RE GOING TO NEW YORK?
YEAH...IT'S JUST...WE HAVE SOME BUSINESS TO ATTEND TO THERE, AND --
DAVID'S SOUL WAS TAKEN BY THE MEN AND WE'RE GOING TO TRY TO GET IT BACK EVEN THOUGH NO ONE'S EVER DONE IT BEFORE.
IS THAT RABBIT?
HOW... LONG AGO DID THEY TAKE YOUR SOUL?
LITTLE OVER A MONTH.
IN THAT CASE...YEAH, IT'S RABBIT.
IT'S SAFE FOR NOW, HE WON'T TURN OR HAVE TO BE KILLED FOR A WHILE YET.
JUST SHOOT ME...
STICK?
OH, NO, LIKE I SAID, THAT WON'T BE NECESSARY FOR A WHILE YET.
NOW, WHERE WERE WE? OH, RIGHT, CATH! WAS JUST STARTING IN ON HER STORY.
EVERY NIGHT'S STORY TELLING NIGHT, YOU SEE. HOW WE GOT HERE, THAT SORT OF THING.
HOW LONG HAVE YOU --
GO ON AHEAD, CATH!

WELL, I WAS JUST SAYING...I GUESS IT WAS RIGHT AROUND THE TIME I TURNED TWENTY-ONE, MY MOTHER...WELL, SHE WAS ALWAYS ON THE SICKLY SIDE, YOU UNDERSTAND, FRAIL YOU MIGHT SAY.
SHE NEEDED SOMEONE TO TAKE CARE OF HER.
SHE WAS ALWAYS VERY PROTECTIVE OF US WHILE WE WERE GROWING UP. KEPT US INSIDE WHILE OTHER KIDS RAN ABOUT RECKLESSLY, GETTING IN TROUBLE AND GIVING EACH OTHER THE FLU...
IT WAS REALLY THE BEST THING FOR US.
ESPECIALLY WHEN MY TWO BROTHERS RAN AWAY AS SOON AS THEY GOT OLD ENOUGH.
IT WAS A TERRIBLE BLOW FOR HER.
A TERRIBLE... BLOW...FOR BOTH OF US.


WE DECIDED THAT IT WAS PROBABLY BETTER THAT I DIDN'T GO TO COLLEGE. IT WOULD TAKE ME AWAY FROM HER TOO LONG, AND AFTER ALL SHE NEEDED SOMEONE TO LOOK AFTER HER.
AFTER A BAD FALL ONE WINTER, SHE STAYED IN BED MOST OF THE TIME. I FED HER, HELPED HER IN AND OUT OF BED, WALKED HER TO THE BATHROOM AND BACK --
-- WASHED, CLEANED, TOOK CARE OF THE HOUSE --
IT DIDN'T LEAVE TIME FOR FRIVOLOUS THINGS.
I HAD TO BE ON CALL. ALL THE TIME. DAY OR NIGHT. I DIDN'T GO TO THE MOVIES OR GO ON DATES, OR...
I WAS ON CALL. I HAD TO BE THERE.

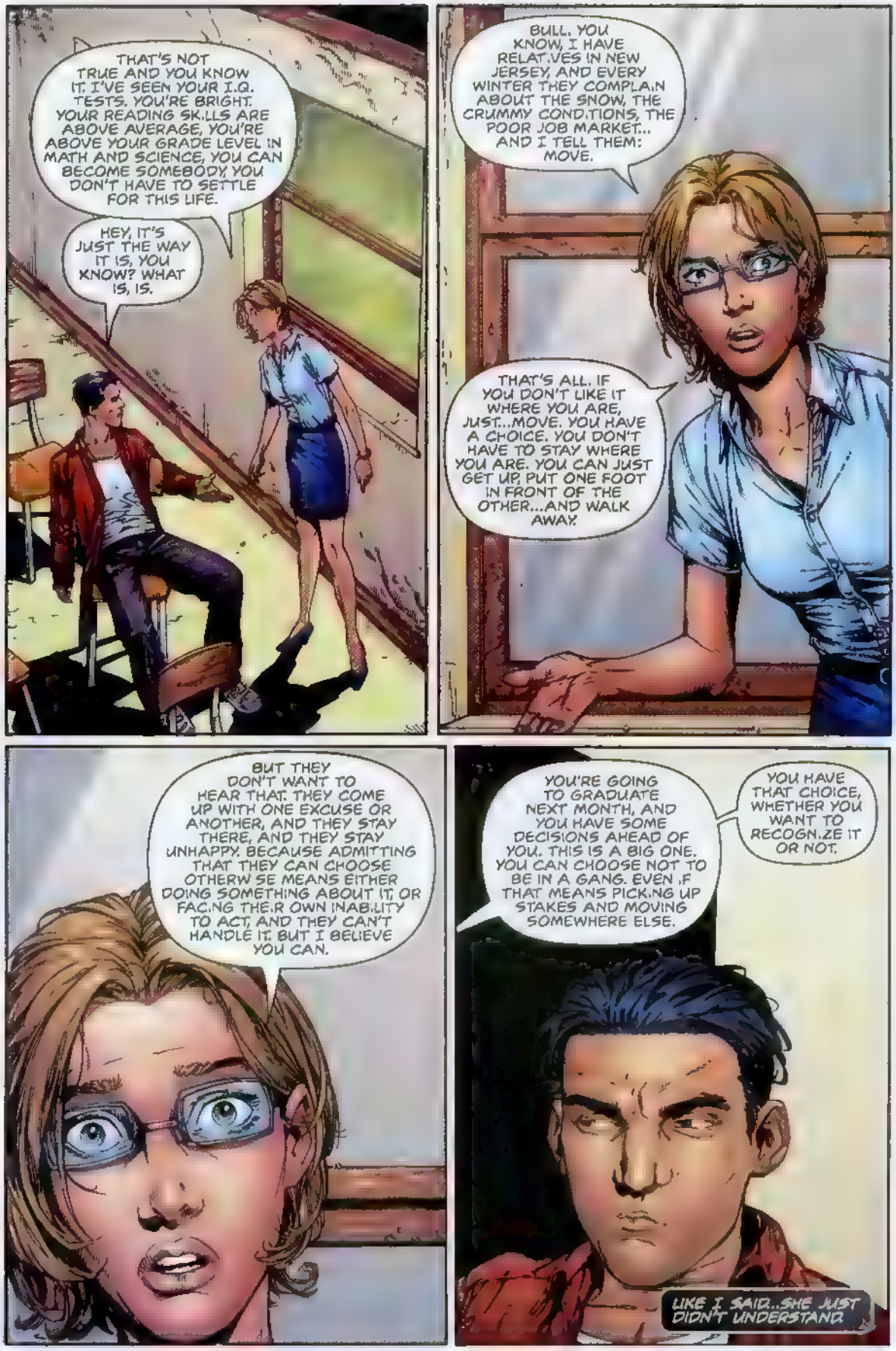

WHICH ISN'T TO SAY I DIDN'T GET OUT. OH, THERE WAS SHOPPING TO DO, AND DRY CLEANING, AND SUPPLIES, AND BOOKS MOTHER NEEDED FROM THE LIBRARY.
I NEVER STAYED OUT TOO LONG. IT WAS TOO DISTRACTING.
YOU'RE WASTING YOUR LIFE AWAY, CATHI. IN SCHOOL, YOU WERE ALWAYS SO...SO VITAL, SO ALIVE. YOU'RE SUFFOCATING IN THERE. YOU HAVE A CHOICE HERE. YOU CAN GET OUT, MAKE YOUR OWN LIFE, YOU JUST HAVE TO --
HOW MUCH?
-SIGH-
TWENTY-SEVEN FIFTY.
SIM
HE DIDN'T UNDERSTAND. NONE OF THEM DID. HOW COULD THEY?
THEY DIDN'T --
IT WAS --
THERE WAS NO WAY OUT. THERE WAS --
I THINK HE LIKED ME.
AFTER A WHILE, HE STOPPED TALKING TO ME. AND THEN HE STOPPED SEEING ME. I COULD WALK OUT WITH THE FOOD AND --
IT WAS AS IF I WASN'T THERE ANYMORE.
AS IF MY MOTHER WAS THE ONLY ONE WHO COULD SEE ME ANYMORE.

AND THEN, ONE DAY, SHE WENT AWAY.
MOTHER...?
...NO...
SHE WAS GONE. JUST LIKE THAT. GONE. AND WHAT DID I HAVE?
WHAT DID I HAVE? AFTER ALL THAT, WHAT DID I HAVE? WHO WAS IT?
IT'S NOT FAIR...
MILK

IT'S NOT FAIR!
IT'S NOT FAIR!
IT'S NOT FAIR!
IT'S NOT FAIR!
IT'S NOT FAIR!
WHO WAS IT?
NO ONE.
NO ONE.
NOTHING. INVISIBLE.
AND THAT... THAT'S HOW I CAME TO BE HERE.

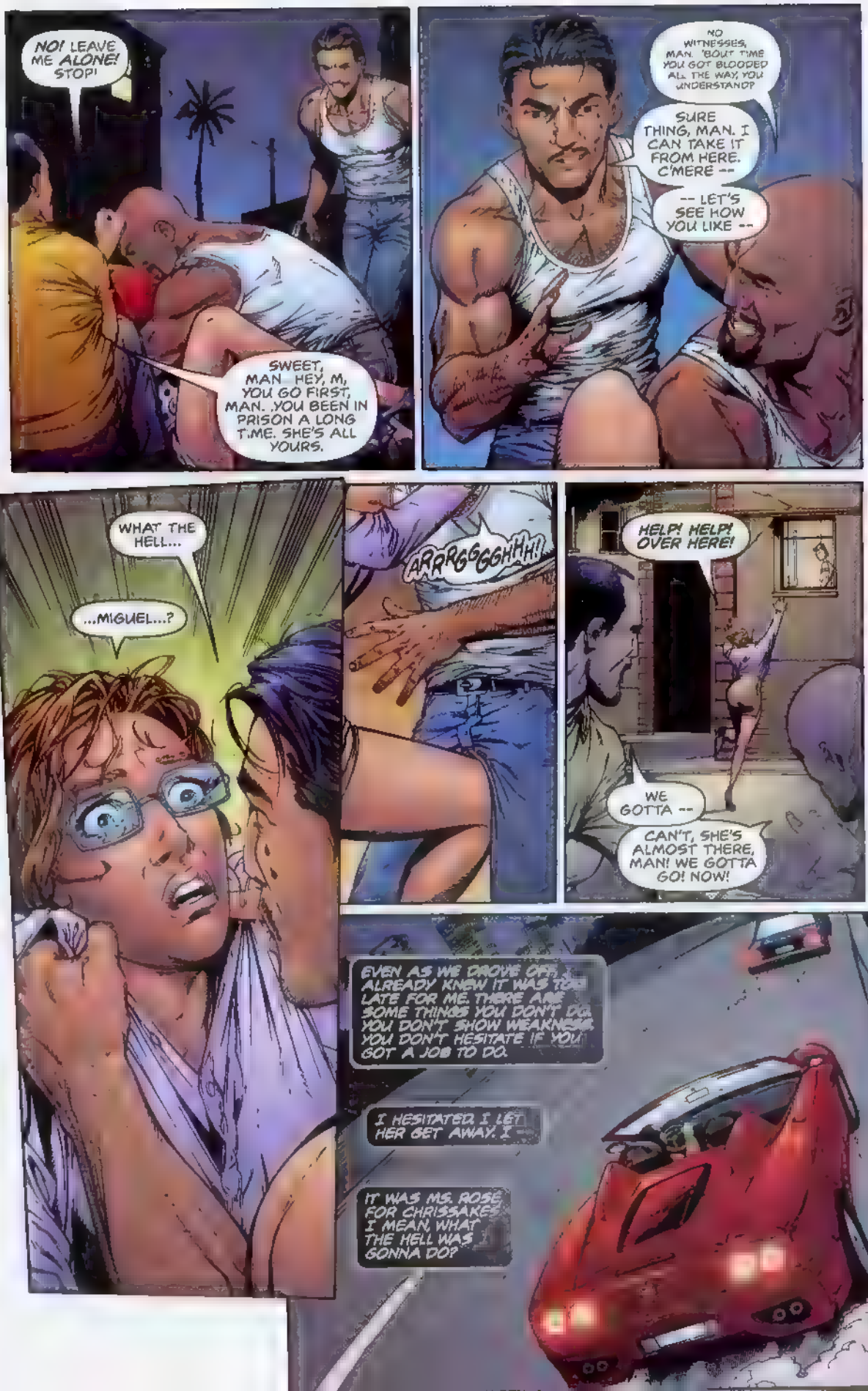
..GODDAMN.
I WAS BORN INTO THE LIFE. WE DIDN'T HAVE A LOT OF OPTIONS, YOU KNOW? MY DAD BELONGED TO THE GANG, AND MY GRANDAD, AND MY UNCLE, AND MY BROTHERS...THAT'S WHY YOU'RE INITIATED LIKE THAT.
M.GUEL? I THINK IT'S YOUR TURN.
RIGHT... R.GHT..
BLOOD IN, BLOOD OUT. YOU ACCEPT THE LIFE, AND THE GANG ACCEPTS YOU, BECAUSE WE KNOW THERE'S NO OTHER WAY OUT.

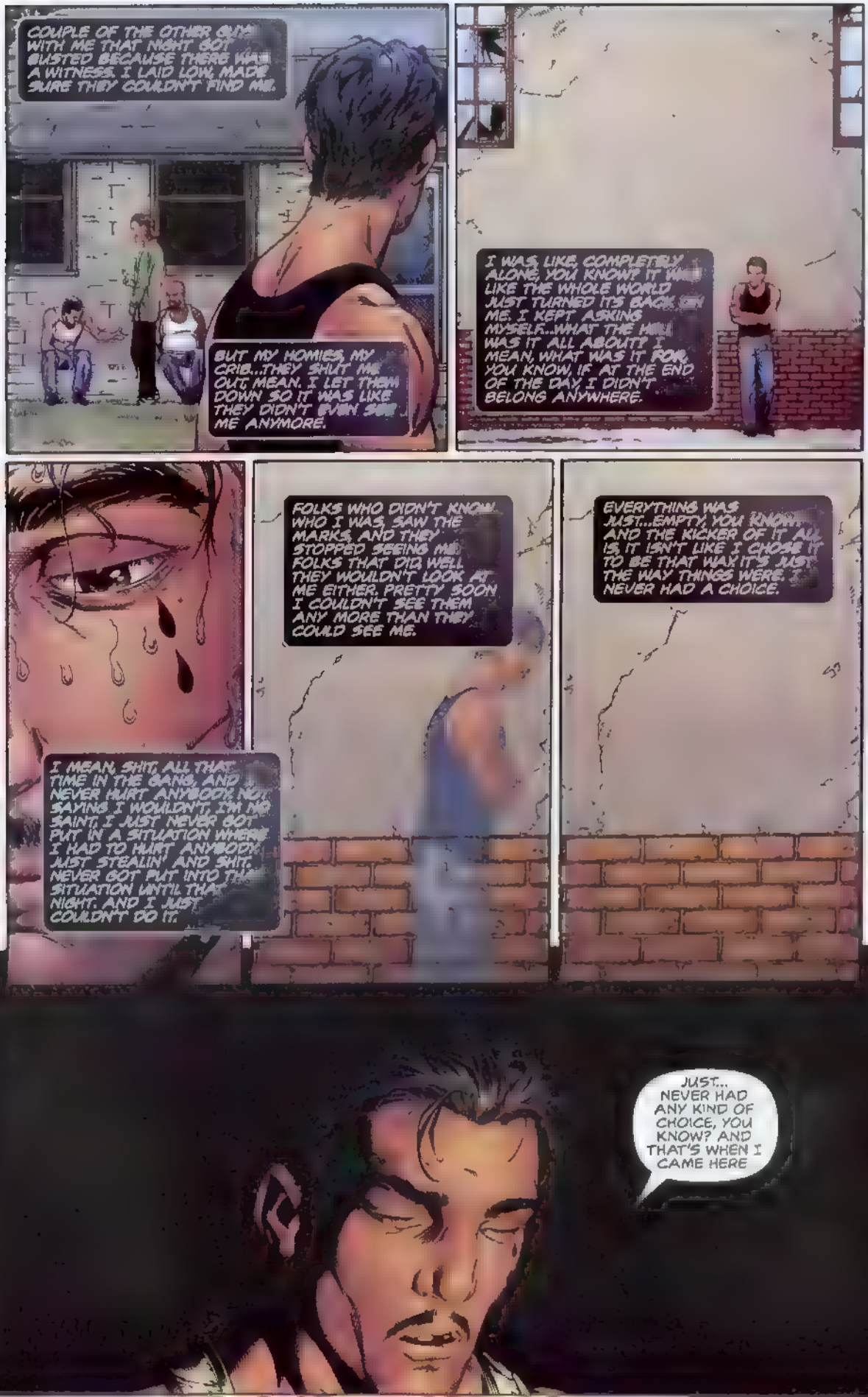
THEY WERE MY HOMIES, YOU KNOW? WE LOOKED AFTER EACH OTHER. BECAUSE NOBODY ELSE WILL.
SURE, IT GOT MESSY SOMETIMES, BUT THAT'S PART OF THE TERRITORY, YOU KNOW? YOU GOT TO PROTECT YOUR OWN.
HEY, MIGUEL! CAVELOS!
YO...
COUNSELOR WANTS TO TALK TO YOU.
AGAIN.
-- AND I JUST DON'T KNOW WHAT IT WILL TAKE TO GET THROUGH TO YOU. YOU'RE THROWING YOUR LIFE AWAY.
IT'S MY LIFE. WHAT'S IT TO YOU?
IT MATTERS TO ME BECAUSE I'VE SEEN TOO MANY KIDS LIKE YOU COME THROUGH HERE AND GET LOST IN THE DRUGS AND GANG LIFESTYLE. HALF OF THEM END UP DEAD BEFORE THEY'RE THIRTY. THE OTHER HALF ARE IN PRISON.
HOW MANY GUYS DO YOU KNOW FROM THE GANG WHO ARE FORTY, FREE AND ALIVE, ALL AT THE SAME TIME?
I DUNNO... I'VE NEVER BEEN TOO GOOD AT MATH, YOU KNOW?
SHE WAS OKAY. I KNOW SHE WAS TRYING TO HELP BUT SHE JUST DIDN'T UNDERSTAND.


THAT'S NOT TRUE AND YOU KNOW IT. I'VE SEEN YOUR I.Q. TESTS. YOU'RE BRIGHT. YOUR READING SK.LLS ARE ABOVE AVERAGE, YOU'RE ABOVE YOUR GRADE LEVEL IN MATH AND SCIENCE. YOU CAN BECOME SOMEBODY. YOU DON'T HAVE TO SETTLE FOR THIS LIFE.
HEY, IT'S JUST THE WAY IT IS, YOU KNOW? WHAT IS, IS.
BULL. YOU KNOW, I HAVE RELAT.VES IN NEW JERSEY, AND EVERY WINTER THEY COMPLA.N ABOUT THE SNOW, THE CRUMMY COND.TIONS, THE POOR JOB MARKET... AND I TELL THEM: MOVE.
THAT'S ALL. IF YOU DON'T LIKE IT WHERE YOU ARE, JUST...MOVE. YOU HAVE A CHOICE. YOU DON'T HAVE TO STAY WHERE YOU ARE. YOU CAN JUST GET UP, PUT ONE FOOT IN FRONT OF THE OTHER...AND WALK AWAY.
BUT THEY DON'T WANT TO HEAR THAT. THEY COME UP WITH ONE EXCUSE OR ANOTHER, AND THEY STAY THERE, AND THEY STAY UNHAPPY. BECAUSE ADMITTING THAT THEY CAN CHOOSE OTHERW SE MEANS EITHER DOING SOMETHING ABOUT IT, OR FAC.NG THE.R OWN INAB.LITY TO ACT, AND THEY CAN'T HANDLE IT. BUT I BELIEVE YOU CAN.
YOU'RE GOING TO GRADUATE NEXT MONTH, AND YOU HAVE SOME DECISIONS AHEAD OF YOU. THIS IS A BIG ONE. YOU CAN CHOOSE NOT TO BE IN A GANG. EVEN .F THAT MEANS PICK.NG UP STAKES AND MOVING SOMEWHERE ELSE.
YOU HAVE THAT CHOICE, WHETHER YOU WANT TO RECOGN.ZE IT OR NOT.
LIKE I SAID...SHE JUST DIDN'T UNDERSTAND.

GUESS IT WAS ABOUT TWO, THREE MONTHS LATER SOME OF US GOT POPPED FOR STEALING A CAR. FIVE MINUTES AWAY FROM THE CHOP SHOP. WHAT KIND OF LUCK IS THAT?
FLASH1
ON TOP OF THAT, I'D JUST TURNED 18 THE DAY BEFORE THEY GRABBED ME, SO I WAS TRIED AS AN ADULT. GIVEN MY PAST RECORD, THEY GAVE ME TWO YEARS UPSTATE.
I GOT IN WITH THE LOCAL HOMIES, SO I WAS PRETTY SAFE. BUT EVEN SO...
EIGHTEEN AND NINETEEN. THOSE ARE SUPPOSED TO BE PRIMO YEARS, YOU KNOW? PARTYIN', GETTIN' LAID, BEING ALL WILD AND STUFF. SUPPOSED TO BE THE BEST YEARS OF YOUR LIFE, YOU KNOW?
YEAH. YEAH, THAT'S IT. TAKE IT. YEAH.
MAINLY, I JUST TRIED TO STAY INVISIBLE. GET OUT AND GET BACK TO MY LIFE, YOU KNOW? GOT MY MARKS, TOO.
ONE FOR EVERY YEAR I WAS THERE.

BUT WHEN I GOT OUT, ANYTIME SOMEBODY SAW THE MARKS, THEY JUST LOOKED AWAY, LIKE THEY DIDN'T EVEN SEE ME.
BACK HOME, THOUGH, THEY KNEW WHO I WAS. I HAD RESPECT NOW.
BUT AFTER A WHILE, YOU WANT SOMEBODY ELSE TO SEE YOU, YOU KNOW? YOU WANT SOMEBODY ELSE TO KNOW THEY GOTTA RESPECT YOU...OR PAY THE PRICE.
OKAY, HANG ON, WE'LL JUMP WHEN HE STOPS AT THE LIGHT.
GET OUTTA THE CAR! GIMME THE KEYS TO THE FREAKIN' CAR OR I'LL BLOW YOUR FREAKIN' HEAD OFF!
OKAY! OKAY! JUST DON'T HURT ANYBODY, DON'T --
-- URK --
HEY! WE GOT US A BONUS!


NO! LEAVE ME ALONE! STOP!
SWEET, MAN. HEY, M, YOU GO FIRST, MAN. YOU BEEN IN PRISON A LONG TIME. SHE'S ALL YOURS.
NO WITNESSES, MAN. 'BOUT TIME YOU GOT BLOODED ALL THE WAY, YOU UNDERSTAND?
SURE THING, MAN. I CAN TAKE IT FROM HERE. C'MERE --
-- LET'S SEE HOW YOU LIKE --
WHAT THE HELL...
...MIGUEL...?
ARRRGGGHHH!
HELP! HELP! OVER HERE!
WE GOTTA --
CAN'T, SHE'S ALMOST THERE, MAN! WE GOTTA GO! NOW!
EVEN AS WE DROVE OFF, I ALREADY KNEW IT WAS TOO LATE FOR ME. THERE ARE SOME THINGS YOU DON'T DO. YOU DON'T SHOW WEAKNESS. YOU DON'T HESITATE IF YOU GOT A JOB TO DO.
I HESITATED. I LET HER GET AWAY. I --
IT WAS MS. ROSE, FOR CHRISSAKES. I MEAN, WHAT THE HELL WAS I GONNA DO?


COUPLE OF THE OTHER GUYS WITH ME THAT NIGHT GOT BUSTED BECAUSE THERE WAS A WITNESS. I LAID LOW, MADE SURE THEY COULDN'T FIND ME.
BUT MY HOMIES, MY CRIB...THEY SHUT ME OUT, MEAN. I LET THEM DOWN SO IT WAS LIKE THEY DIDN'T EVEN SEE ME ANYMORE.
I WAS, LIKE, COMPLETELY ALONE, YOU KNOW? IT WAS LIKE THE WHOLE WORLD JUST TURNED ITS BACK ON ME. I KEPT ASKING MYSELF...WHAT THE HELL WAS IT ALL ABOUT? I MEAN, WHAT WAS IT FOR, YOU KNOW, IF AT THE END OF THE DAY, I DIDN'T BELONG ANYWHERE.
I MEAN, SHIT, ALL THAT TIME IN THE GANG, AND I NEVER HURT ANYBODY. NO, SAYING I WOULDN'T. I'M NO SAINT, I JUST NEVER GOT PUT IN A SITUATION WHERE I HAD TO HURT ANYBODY. JUST STEALIN' AND SHIT. NEVER GOT PUT INTO THE SITUATION UNTIL THAT NIGHT. AND I JUST COULDN'T DO IT.
FOLKS WHO DIDN'T KNOW WHO I WAS, SAW THE MARKS, AND THEY STOPPED SEEING ME. FOLKS THAT DID WELL THEY WOULDN'T LOOK AT ME EITHER. PRETTY SOON I COULDN'T SEE THEM ANY MORE THAN THEY COULD SEE ME.
EVERYTHING WAS JUST...EMPTY, YOU KNOW? AND THE KICKER OF IT ALL IS, IT ISN'T LIKE I CHOSE IT TO BE THAT WAY. IT'S JUST THE WAY THINGS WERE. I NEVER HAD A CHOICE.
JUST... NEVER HAD ANY KIND OF CHOICE, YOU KNOW? AND THAT'S WHEN I CAME HERE

-- ALWAYS WANTED TO ASK THIS GIRL OUT ON A DATE BACK IN COLLEGE, BUT IT WAS ALWAYS TOO RISKY --
-- WANDERED UNTIL I GOT HERE, THE ROAD'S NOT SAFE, TOO DANGEROUS --
-- I MEAN, WHAT THE HELL'S THE POINT OF GOING TO COLLEGE IF YOU'RE TOO OLD, JUST LOOK LIKE A DAMNED FOOL --
-- NEVER MUCH LIKED MY JOB, BUT I DIDN'T LEAVE OR ANYTHING, I MEAN, BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW THAN THE DEVIL YOU DON'T, RIGHT? SO, ANYWAY --
-- STARTED TO LOOK FOR FOOD OVER THE R.SE, BUT IT'S DARK OUT THERE, AND THE ROAD'LL KILL YOU EVERY TIME, SO I JUST STAYED HERE --
-- DIDN'T WANT TO RISK IT --
-- BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW --
SO WHAT ABOUT YOU?
ME?
YOU. I MEAN, YOU'RE HERE, RIGHT?
I GOT NO BUSINESS BE NG HERE. I DON'T BELONG HERE.
WE'LL JUST BE A MOMENT.
CAREFUL OUT THERE, IT'S DARK.
STAY CLOSE. THE ROAD'LL KILL YOU IF YOU'RE NOT CAREFUL. SOME FOLKS GO OVER THE RISE, BUT THEY NEVER COME BACK.
NOPE, THEY NEVER COME BACK.

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO, DAVID?
I'M NOT LIKE THEM.
I DIDN'T SAY YOU WERE.
BUT NOW THAT YOU BRING IT UP --
I'M NOT, OKAY? I'M JUST... NOT.
HOW CAN YOU JUST GIVE UP ON US LIKE THIS, DAVID?
I DIDN'T SAY I WAS GIVING UP ON US --
YOU WON'T TAKE TIME FROM THE JOB FOR US. YOU WON'T --
WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO, TELL EVERYBODY IN L.A. TO STOP KILLING EACH OTHER SO WE CAN TAKE A QUIET WEEKEND IN SANTA BARBARA?
LOOK, I GOTTA GO, I'M LATE FOR WORK AS IT IS, WE'LL FINISH THIS LATER --
YOU CAN'T JUST WALK OUT IN THER MIDDLE OF THIS, DAVID! DAMN IT, I'M YOUR WIFE! HOW CAN YOU DO THIS?
BECAUSE I HAVE TO, THAT'S ALL.
I DON'T HAVE ANY CHOICE HERE.
I DON'T HAVE ANY CHOICE HERE.
SO LIKE I SAID...WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO NEXT?
I'M GOING OVER THAT RISE TO SEE WHAT'S ON THE OTHER SIDE.
YOU SURE? COULD BE RISKY. THEY SAID NOBODY'S EVER COME BACK. THAT'S WHY THEY DON'T LEAVE --

I'M GOING.
GOOD.
HI THERE...
YOU'RE LUCKY TO HAVE MADE IT THIS FAR. HERE, HAVE A SEAT, GET COMFY. IT'S A DANGEROUS NIGHT OUT, YOU KNOW. CAN'T TAKE ANY CHANCE WITH WHATEVER'S OUT THERE.

YER CAN'T TRUST WHAT'S OUT THERE OVER THE NEXT RIDGE.
CAN'T TAKE ANY CHANCES, YOU KNOW.
BETTER TO STAY HERE --
THE ROAD'LL KILL YOU --
BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW THAN THE DEVIL YOU DON'T --

YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT?
NO. I'VE... GOT TO THINK ABOUT THIS A WHILE.
BESIDES, YOU WOULDN'T UNDERSTAND.
OH...I DON'T KNOW ABOUT THAT...
WHAT?
NOTHING. IT'S NOT TIME FOR THAT YET ANYWAY. MAYBE SOON, THOUGH.
TIME FOR WHAT?
THE BLEEDING.
...LAU...RE!!!!...
TO BE CONTINUED!